DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 088 148 EA 005 771

TITLE	SRI-EPRC Summary.
INSTITUTION	Stanford Research Inst., Menlo Park, Calif. Educational Policy Research Center.
PUB DATE	[72]
NOTE	5p.
EDRS PRICE	MF-$0.75 HC-$1.50
DESCRIPTORS	Archives; Decentralization; *Educational Change; *Educational Development; Educational Innovation; Educational Objectives; *Educational Research; *Federal Programs; *Futures (of Society); Social Change
IDENTIFIERS	*National Institute of Education; NIE; NIE Archives

ABSTRACT

This summary lists the conclusions drawn from future-oriented inquiry into the societal context of education used to guide the analysis of goals and NIE program alternatives. Areas of concern specifically identified were (1) policy-oriented research on the societal context of education; (2) decentralized approaches to increase the effectiveness of the educational R&D system; (3) multiorganizational coordination; and (4) anticipatory identification of education-related problems. Some developed program alternatives and their supporting rationales are listed. (Author/MLF)

ED 088148

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SRI/EPRC SUMMARY

Background

The formation of a National Institute of Education offers a landmark opportunity to transform educational R&D programming such that it becomes responsive to educational needs which cannot be adequately fulfilled by current knowledge and practice. Given that education exists to serve the needs of society and its citizens, and that a three to ten year period is typically required before applied R&D products become mature, educational R&D programming must be responsive not only to current societal conditions and needs, but to anticipated conditions and needs as well.

The following conclusions from future-oriented inquiry into the societal context of education were used to guide the analysis of goals and NIE program alternatives performed by the SRI/EPRC team:

- Many of the education-related problems facing our society are systemic in nature--they have determinant roots in non-educational sectors of society, and "single-sector" attempts at resolution are often not successful (e.g., in education of the disadvantaged and "career education").

- The society is undergoing an increasingly accelerated rate of change, including a transition from an industrial, production-oriented society to a post-industrial, service-oriented society; and is becoming increasingly "close-coupled" (where a change in one sector quickly and strongly impacts on other sectors, often in unanticipated ways).

- Viewed from an historical perspective, the present era (dating from the industrial revolution until, perhaps, the early part of the 21st century) must be viewed as unique. It is a period in which man is living off a legacy of virtually non-replenishable minerals and fossil fuels. It was preceded by millenia during which man's consumption from the ecological reservior was small and his impact on the non-human environment minor. It must be followed by a period of indefinite duration in which human activity fits into some new set of ecological relationships which are likely to be antithetical to many of the basic values on which Western institutions are based.

- The rate of change will likely extend to changing values and basic premises of the culture.

- The needed changes cannot come from and are unlikely to be controlled by centralized, top-down strategies unless authoritarian methods are resorted to.

Identification of Goals

The educational goals articulated by the SRI/EPRC team reflected the above conclusions as well as the conventional educational literature and the Congressional hearings on NIE. A variety of educational and societal problems were identified from which these educational goals were derived. Such problems were characterized as being chronic, acute, or adaptive in nature. Chronic problems are those that have existed in the past and are expected to exist in the future (in spite of remedial efforts). Acute problems are those which appear to be of critical immediate importance. Adaptive problems stem from stresses and dislocations inducted by the high rate of change in various sectors of society which impact on education. Although chronic problems need continuing attention and acute problems seem most demanding of immediate attention, the importance of anticipatory R&D in preventing adaptive problems from becoming acute was especially stressed.

A variety of specific goals were identified in the report. The following are seen as being of especially high priority if education and educational R&D is to be responsive to characteristics of the likely future:

- To continually anticipate new developments which will impact on education so as to avoid the crisis-orientation so typical of present programs.
- To develop the arts with which "multi-sector" approaches to education-related problems would be more feasible.
- To balance centralized financing and planning of educational R&D with decentralized approaches to educational problem solving, thus contributing to the development of a competent problem-solving infrastructure in society.
- To encourage cultural pluralism in education, with an emphasis on cultural unity through constructive change--especially as regards education for the "have nots" and "have lots".
- To foster consumer choice in education.
- To foster a high degree of tolerance, flexibility, and an ability to cope with varied cultural norms. This implies an emphasis on the ability to gain new skills over the attainment of any particular skill, on having access to knowledge and skills to integrate new knowledge, and on the development of self-reliance over dependence on experts.

Identification of Programs

In general, the SRI/EPRC team tried to complement--rather than duplicate--the results of others' efforts, and so did not seek comprehensiveness; therefore only a small fraction of the educational goals articulated in the first phase of the analysis were developed into program alternatives for NIE. Four areas of concern reflecting the above conclusions were specifically addressed: (1) policy-oriented research on the societal context of education; (2) decentralized approaches to increase the effectiveness of the educational R&D system; (3) multi-organizational coordination; and (4) anticipatory identification of education related problems.

Research programs in each of the first three areas of concern are developed in a separate section of the report. Rather than develop in detail the wide variety of research programs that would respond to anticipated problems, however, it was felt more suitable to list such problems in the section on Societal Context Research where they can be referred to by NIE planners.

A listing of developed program alternatives and their supporting rationale is as follows:

Societal Context Research

The changing context of society needs to be anticipated by R&D planning if the results of R&D are to reduce the need for crisis-oriented programs. Also, long-range implications of present policies need to be drawn out as part of the overall policy analysis of educational programs. Such research is usefully partitioned into work that is conclusion-oriented (element 1 below), decision-oriented (elements 2,3, and 4 below), and translation/dissemination-oriented (elements 5 and 6 below). The program elements thus developed are:

(1) Holistic Analysis of Society: inquiry into the broad alternative prospects that are plausible for society, and identification of broad strategies that seem desirable.

(2) Trend and Event Analysis: in-depth inquiry into key trends and events having particular relevance to the planning of anticipatory R&D.

(3) Anticipatory Needs Assessment: articulation of education-related needs that are responsive to plausible future conditions in society.

(4) Policy Implications: assessment of present or proposed policies in terms of plausible societal consequences.

(5) Integration/Translation: repackaging results from the above studies for improved dissemination and utilization.

(7) Support of Unsolicited Research

Increasing the Effectiveness of the Educational R&D System

A variety of program proposals have been made to the NIE Planning Unit which would further the existing trends toward strong agency-based management of educational R&D at the Federal level. Given the decentralized character of American education with its strong traditions of local control, and the likely character of future societal developments, complementary R&D strategies of a more decentralized character are needed to balance this emphasis--programs designed to increase both desires and abilities at the local level for educational renewal. The following programs were identified with these needs in mind:

(A) A decentralized market-mechanism. This approach would seek to foster the emergence of a competitive system of offerings by both public and private sectors from which state and local educational agencies could "purchase" needed R&D services.

(1) Funding incentive contracts for development of public and private marketing capabilities and R&D services.

(2) Categorical funding of educational agencies for their discretionary purchase of desired R&D services and consultation.

(3) A clearinghouse for vendor information

(4) A consumer-oriented better business bureau type activity.

(B) Programs to increase the local incentive to innovate. These programs would seek to increase the public awareness of the need for educational renewal, and the skills to initiate such activity at the local level.

(1) Change-Agent Training: special training programs--either in anticipation of, or simultaneous with formal programs of educational renewal--especially targeted for school principals and selected teachers. Such training could become part of university-based teacher training curricula.

(2) Social Marketing Approaches: Federal exploration of social marketing as a means to increase the effectiveness of dissemination and to increase salience of such problems as the lack of status of teaching in "problem" elementary schools.

a. State of art survey on community involvement.

b. Conference on ways to promote voluntary participation.

c. Contract to develop practical models of participation in educational assessment and planning,

d. Contract to develop a model for participation,

Research on Multi-Organizational Coordination

Due to the increasing "close-coupling" of society and the systemic nature of many educational problems cited earlier, multi-sector approaches to education-related problems appear increasingly necessary. The literature relating to the state-of-the-art of multi-organizational coordination is very fragmented, has not been summarized, and appears to exist largely in the form of unpublished government memoranda or similar reports. The following research programs were identified to deal with these needs:

(1) A State-of-the-Art Assessment and Analysis Project: a one-shot study to summarize and interpret the literature and personal knowledge of persons with relevant multi-organizational experience.

(2) A Research Advisory Committee on Multi-organizational Coordination: a standing panel of experts on the state-of-the-art of multi-organizational research and operations (between Federal agencies, between Federal, state, and local levels of government, and between the public and private sectors).

(3) A Research, Development, and Training Center for Multi-Organizational Concerns: institutional support for a university- associated but independent center to conduct conclusion-oriented and decision-oriented research on problems of multi-organizational coordination, and to manage training fellowship and field internship programs.